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ABSTRACT

The present paper considers critical factors in the experience of young people that need to be taken into account in order to understand them and to develop prevention programs. Drawing on research and the literature on socialization, social psychology, and drug abuse, an ethnographically informed social context model of the actor is developed and its implications for prevention activities among ghetto youths examined. (Author)

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A FRAMEWORK FOR DEVELOPING DRUG ABUSE PREVENTION STRATEGIES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE IN GHETTO AREAS

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ABSTRACT

The present paper considers critical factors in the experience of young people that need to be taken into account in order to understand them and to develop prevention programs. Drawing upon research and the literature on socialization, social psychology and drug abuse, an ethnographically informed, social context model of the actor is developed and its implications for prevention activities among ghetto youths examined.

A FRAMEWORK FOR DEVELOPING DRUG ABUSE PREVENTION STRATEGIES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE IN GHETTO AREAS

Considerable concern has been expressed over the problem of drug abuse among young people. However, there has been a lack of meaningful research into the relationships youngsters establish with the settings in which they live, which could provide insight into this phenomenon. In large part, the limited knowledge that has been gathered in regard to how young people relate to drugs and other aspects of their environment results from a simplistic conception of the process of socialization that has dominated the field of social science. Focussing on the manner in which the young are schooled into society by one or more means of social learning, this view has neglected to give sufficient attention to the wider network of beliefs and behavior by which individuals seek to integrate their experience. Further, its static view of culture transmission, with different individuals seen as incorporating societal expectations in similar ways, has delayed the development of a more complete understanding of the creative relationship individuals have to their experience, and the ways in which their attitudes and participations reflect a strain toward self-consistency.[1]

Applied to the field of drug abuse prevention, the view of socialization as the uniform transmission of cultural standards found reflection in techniques and approaches reflecting the biases and assumptions of their research or program creators, rather than the various identifications and involvements of members of their different target audiences. One consequence of this application is the growing recognition that drug abuse prevention efforts have not been very

successful and that a more radical conceptualization of the issues is indicated.

The present paper considers critical factors in the experience of young people that should be taken into account in understanding them and in the development of prevention programs. In the course of the discussion, an ethographically informed, social context model of the individual will be developed and its implications for prevention activities explored.

A SOCIAL CONTEXT VIEW OF THE ADOLESCENT EXPERIENCE

The process of becoming a social person is not one of merely adopting prevailing values and approved ways of behaving, but an attempt to self-actualize one's potential for participating in society. As Wrong suggests, we are closer to reality by regarding man as becoming social but never completely socialized.[2] Learning the basic rules of the society in which one lives can be regarded as a prerequisite for being accepted as a competent member of that society.[3] However, these experiences do not, in themselves, determine what kind of social person the individual will become and what contribution he will make to society. Recent research has shown that individuals are both purposive and goal directed in their behavior, and not passive participants in their experiences. Aspects of experience are made to fit into the lives of young people, and how they do so depends upon what features of their social environment they regard as important.

In the process of adapting to their environment, youngsters relate to their families, school and peers in different ways. In order to

understand how these agencies of socialization exert their influence analysis must be made of the young people upon whom they operate, rather than focus our attention on these agencies themselves. What is required is a more creative model of the individual. We can never hope to understand the process of socialization if we gloss over the social psychological characteristics of individuals and the larger social genesis of their life situation.[4]

The line of argument we have been developing posits that society consists of many different life experiences and that this understanding must inform our work if we are to convey a realistic picture of what it means to become a member of society. As Hannerz notes, "people of different life styles have different kinds of networks, and the difference influences the quantity and quality of interaction between them."[5] Accordingly, stronger efforts should be made to assess the experiences in people's environment that influence their adaptation to society. A social context model of socialization is needed.

Rather than seeing individuals as being pushed by the stresses and strains in the structure of society, the social context model sees their behavior as purposeful, meaningful and goal directed within the frames of reference of the life circumstances in which they find themselves. Differences in social attitudes and styles of life are the rule and not the exception in social life.

The social context view stresses the voluntaristic character of people's behavior, and seeks to uncover the life experience of different, socially situated groups that serve as guides to understanding the way they act. There is a critical need to determine the

patterns of environmental adaptation that integrate the behavioral and attitudinal characteristics of these persons. In marked contrast to the survey-statistical approach, demographic analyses are regarded as an initial step in isolating the characteristics of a life experience to which behavior and value adjustments are made. Particular importance is paid to locate the subcultural value systems that are related to the social, cultural and psychological conditions in which different groups of individuals find themselves. Economic and social status attributes of people are regarded as demographic signposts permitting a more focussed search for the factors of motivation and purpose regulating adjustment behavior; they are not regarded as explanations for action. It is essential that we trace these environmental features, through the orientations and values of real live persons, to their behavior to grasp the essence of this approach. Following Schutz and Weber,[6] we argue that we have little knowledge of people until we understand their perceptions of the world and the meanings they attach to their actions. We need to adopt a phenomenological perspective in our work.

An essential aspect of the social context model of society that is being developed concerns the individual's self-concept. Stemming from the work of Cooley, W.I. Thomas, James and Schutz,[7] this concept stresses the importance of understanding people's views of their experience if we are to learn how they behave. While there is a cognitive element in the self, it is important to emphasize that the self is a social creation. Extrapolating from the work of Mead and Gerth and Mills,[8] the self is a product of the interactive experiences

the individual has with others in his environment. And, relating the self to social behavior, Lecky was perhaps the first social scientist to posit that people strive for unity and consistency in their activities.[9]

This concept of the self converges with the thrust of the work by Rogers, Hilgard, Maslow, Schutz, Garfinkel and Hudson,[10] who, among others, have argued for the innovative, creative nature of interaction. This work asserts that individuals' perceive various ways of participating in the social circumstances in which they find themselves, and that the activities that people engage in fit into values that are important to them. The notion of preferred behavior provides a base against which people's involvements with particular aspects of their environment can be examined. Applied to research methodology, this interest requires that we develop social biographies of individuals and groups in specific cultural and social settings which tie together essential features of their life experience, behavior and attitudes.

This approach to understanding behavior found reflection in a recent inquiry into the values and social behavior of aggressive and non-aggressive youngsters residing in a social problem neighborhood in the northeast of England.[11] The study involved depth interviews with ninety-nine boys who were rated as aggressive or non-aggressive by their peers, judged on the basis of behavior measures that were derived from ethonographic research.[12]

The youngsters ranged in age from 12 to 15 years, came from working-class backgrounds, were low educational achievers, had IQs above 80 and had no police records. Analysis of the data found the aggressive and non-aggressive youths to define themselves differently, but in a manner that was consistent with the ratings their peers had made of them.

Aggressive lads strongly emphasized the display of physical prowess, seeing success in such pursuits as sports, fighting and getting on with girls as affirming the picture they wished to present of themselves. Non-aggressive youths, on the other hand, were less concerned with asserting themselves in physically aggressive ways, and were more interested in the content of their school experience. As might be expected, both samples of young people preferred different friends.

Perhaps the most impressive finding to emerge from this research, which links up with work completed by Miller and Wolfgang and Ferracuti,[13] is the fact that the youngsters' neighborhood culture afforded alternative possibilities of environmental adaptation for them to orient themselves to and act out. Two of these possibilities that were relevant to their experience were: (1) street culture orientation (a gravitation to the values of the street gangs that were prevalent in the neighborhood where the research was carried out) and (2) educational orientation (stressing the value of education and success at school work). As one would expect, aggressive boys were significantly oriented to the values of the street culture, whereas non-aggressive lads were educationally oriented.

Another important dimension of environmental relationship concerned a toughness orientation, which was based on a number of questions probing the youths' perception of their neighborhood: (1) "You've got to be rough to get ahead in life," (2) "You've got to be tough to get on around here," (3) "I like to be on my own and be my own boss" and (4) "People my age in my neighborhood get into fights". Again, aggressive youths were found to have significantly higher toughness

orientations than non-aggressive boys. Further analysis learned that these orientations were strongly reflected in the youths' self-images.[14]

The impressively consistent clustering of dimensions of the youths' relationship to their environment with their self-images highlight the central thesis of this paper: Youths selectively commit themselves to features of their neighborhood culture in a way that fits in with the images they hold of themselves. Their involvements appear motivated and adjustive, holding a complex relationship to their personality and environment. One would gain limited insight by merely focussing on the youngsters as individuals or on the social values that are prevalent in their social setting. Only as these features of the youths' experience become internalized do they become important in learning about them.

DRUG USE

The finding that individuals relate purposefully to their social and cultural experience converges with the results of research probing the relationships people establish with various substances. The thrust of this work has convincingly indicated that there exist diverse life styles to which different groups, and even persons within the same family, commit themselves.[15] Reflective of the concern that has been expressed over the endemic problem of drug abuse among persons living in socially depressed areas, most of the sociocultural information that is available on substance relationships is concentrated on persons living in these sectors of society.

Styles of Ghetto Drug Life

For a series of economic and social reasons, slum residents are alienated from a meaningful participation in the mainstream of American life. Ghetto areas have high rates of crime, delinquency, drunkenness, prostitution, mental distrubance, suicide, drug use, illegitimacy and family maladjustment.[16] And it is here that the police have their greatest community relations problems and face fairly organized criminal activities that closely relate to the economic and civil stability of these settings.

The ghetto resident inhabits as tough and testing an environment as exists in American life, where survival until adulthood demands cunning and toughness. The ability to fend for oneself in the streets provides a basis not only for one's prestige (or rep), but that of his family as well. In this setting, substance relationships are integrated to fit into the varying life styles of ghetto culture. Perhaps the most illuminating research ever conducted on the diverse drug use patterns in a ghetto setting was accomplished by Blumer, Sutter and their associates among youngsters in Oakland, California during the mid-1960's.[17] While this research may be faulted in not being as systematically carried out as one might wish, it provides us with a lucid and compelling account of the drug behavior of a social problem area.

In line with the thrust of the present paper, the work of Blumer and his associates argues that rather then viewing drug use in slum environments as a form of personal pathology or retreatism from the larger society, patterns of drug involvement reflect a sense of

affirmation:

> The culture of drug use on the street scene is constituted by different types of drug users, different sets of practices, different life styles and perspectives. Furthermore, a vast selection process differentiates people at major turning points as they enter into and move through different worlds of drug use, fall into different patterns and sequences of patterns of use, form different kinds of associations, and have different career lines. Any attempt to describe and analyze the phenomenon of street-level drug use in terms of a cultural system must account for different types of users, most grasp the nature of this selective process, and must recognize that worlds of drug use are subject to great fluctuations over time.[18]

Reflective of the divergent options that are available to youths in the Oakland area where the research was conducted is a division of the world of drug use into the rowdy and cool operating styles. The former category of youngsters begin to sniff glue and use alcohol (mainly wine) during pre-adolescence. The stress of these youths on the display of physical prowess, violence and delinquency results in their being kept at a distance by devotees of the cool style, who value the control of one's presentation and behavior.

Cool youths can be further differentiated into three types: (1) the mellow dude, (2) the pot head and (3) the player. The mellow dude, the most prevalent type among the cool group, primarily uses marijuana, this substance being an expression of his interests in partying, sexual conquests and the quest for various sensual experiences. He participates in conventional activities, such as attending school, athletics and dress. Marijuana use comprises a small segment of his daily activities. He does not go out of his way to purchase drugs, takes no special pride in their use and does not engage in the sale of

any substance. The pot head also confines his drug use to marijuana, and places similar stress on the activities pursued by the mellow dude. However, he seeks out his substance of preference, tends to buy his own drugs and may have dealings with a "connection". His ability to "score" drugs is an additional source of esteem among his associates, reflecting a valued access to the echelons of drug traffic. Whiles he considers himself the antithesis of the heroin addict, the head has heavily committed himself to the use of the weed, which constitutes an important reference point in understanding the conduct of his daily life. The player is more involved in the drug life, being distinguished from the mellow dude and pot head primarily in his instrumental approach to drugs as a means of making money. Standing at the fringe of commitment to a criminal career, the player cultivates relationships with the lower echelons of the drug distribution system in his area. He is an important link in the flow of drugs among neighborhood youths, and in the incipient stages of cultivating the skills of the hustler and association of recognized hustlers.

Most of the Oakland youths who used drugs were found in the rowdy and cool categories, with a significant movement to the cool way being engaged by rowdy youngsters who became "turned on" to the cool style by friends or associates, "aware" that they are held in low esteem because of their aggressive behavior or form a friendship with a non-rowdy crowd. Some players will pursue a progressively deepening drug involvement through dependence on heroin, a relationship that is usually preceded by a "chipping" phase during which the substance is used intermittently. However, the progression from being cool to

becoming a "righteous" dope fiend is by no means automatic.[19]

In moving between different levels of the Oakland drug scene youngsters are seen as motivated by the quest to achieve the recognition and self-esteem that comes with realizing culturally valued behavior. While some youths might be seduced into using drugs, for most individuals substance usage represents a socially encouraged, but individually made commitment. It is, as Blumer observes, a complex process "that depends on the basic factors of access to drugs, acceptance by drug-using associates, the kinds of images youngsters have of drugs, and the runs of experience that affect their interpretation of drugs."[20] The work completed by Blumer and Sutter ties in well with the findings Finestone obtained in studying the "cool cat" phenomenon in Chicago in the 1950's and with the results Feldman and Preble and Casey uncovered in their inquiries into the place of heroin in the street life of social problem areas in Boston and New York, respectively.[21] While variations were found in the components of Finestone's "coolcats" and their Oakland counterparts in that the former preferred heroin, rather than marijuana, there is a significant overlap between the two ghetto drug adaptations. The Chicago cat was, also, committed to the values of "charm, ingratiating speech, (sharp) dress, (progressive) music, the proper dedication to his 'kick', and unrestrained generosity to make of his day-to-day life itself a gracious work of art."[22]

The thrust of the research by Feldman in East Highland is equally compelling. Here an individual's choice of drugs was found to reflect the beliefs, values and avenues of prestige (or loss of it) among young

men deciding where to fit in the local order of things. The hierarchies of street and drug behavior were found to mutually serve to allocate persons to positions in the area; in fact, drug use provided both an indication of one's status in these groupings and a reflection of his aspiration as to where he would like to be located.

Feldman's finding that East Highland, blue-collar youths affirmed themselves through the use of drugs, rather than using them as a means of escape or retreat, is supported by the research of Preble and Casey. Their examination of the life of lower class, New York City heroin users uncovered an elaborate system of drug distribution and related activities to exist in the street heroin market, one in which addicts found meaning and purpose. Heroin users were less addicted to the drug than to the career of being an addict. However, in regard to our social context position, the authors note that the heroin career pattern can be regarded as an alternative to "the monotony of any existence severely limited by social constraints, and at the same time it provides a way for him to gain revenge on society for the injustices and deprivation he has experienced."[23] The heroin life is both means and goal for the street addict, a way of existence that has generated a folkore and whose salient features would appear to overlap in different social problem areas.[24]

It is to be appreciated that changes in drug distribution patterns in recent years have had an impact on drug relationships in the ghetto. However, because the drug life fulfills deep-rooted needs, and committed users are highly adaptable to alterations in the market place, it is expected that major features of the life style, such as the quest for

the cool and the status of hustling ability, will remain, although the drugs of preference will alter. Such may well be the case with the growth of illicit methadone abuse.[25] As Stephens suggests, the street addict may be a generic type, encompassing a wide range of drug preferences.[26]

SOME IMPLICATIONS FOR PREVENTION

Much of the history of drug abuse prevention has consisted of efforts to provide information in regard to the dangers of abusing drugs in the belief that such knowledge would deter youngsters from using particular substances. Recent work has shown, however, that information in itself is not sufficient to persuade youths from abusing drugs.[27] Drug abusers usually hold a set of beliefs and rationalizations supporting their particular substance relationships, and these offset the potential impact scientific knowledge could have on their drug behavior. In a related way, didactic, moralistic approaches designed to scare youngsters from using drugs have served to alienate students from the agents as well as the aims of prevention, and increased their mistrust of the intentions of drug educators. These techniques, and others like them, are bound to fail. They represent reflections of adult misunderstandings of how to effectively communicate with youngsters, and bear little relationship to the salient features of young peoples' experience with their life. An understanding of the kinds of relationships young people in particular social and cultural settings establish with their environment, including their use of various substances, is basic to the development of effective drug abuse prevention programs. The recent shift in the thrust

of prevention to encourage youngsters to seek alternatives to using drugs, while an improvement over previous efforts, is problematic. In some social settings, there may be few activities that can effectively compete with involvement in the drug life. Further, the very notion of alternatives begs the question of why youths establish drug relationships in the first place.[28]

To be effective, drug prevention efforts must articulate with the important experiences of young people. Prevention programs must be able to address young people's relationships with drugs in a way that reflects awareness of the motivations, rationalizations and symbolic meanings they hold in regard to drug use, and how substance relationships fit into the patterns of life that exist in specific and cultural settings.

This agenda for prevention argues against the probability that national campaigns will have any more than a superficial impact in reducing substance abuse among youngsters living in social problem areas. It requires that we seek to develop prevention programs for particular target audiences. In this effort, we need to locate the salient features of the life experience of different social and cultural groups that serve as guides to understanding their attitudes and behavior. Since the real-life features of any social group are to some degree specific to them, it is not possible to know in advance what these would look like in any setting, without going in and having a good look around. However, the principles of this approach are easily generalizable:

1. We must locate the social and demographic life circumstances of the people for whom drug prevention program are to be developed;

2. We must uncover the cultural and social values and behavior that are important to these persons; and

3. We must learn how the first two factors, or life style characteristics, relate to purposive behavior, including the use of drugs.

This perspective demands a detailed focus that treats the three outlined propositions as empirical issues in any inquiry and in program planning. It urges that drug usage be seen as one facet of persons' social and personal experience.

To do less than elaborate the comprehensive model we set out is to limit the contribution social science research can make to the development of more effective prevention programs. The pilot work in which we engaged in several South Bronx, New York City neighborhoods in the Summer and Fall, 1974 suggests the usefulness of this approach. We have incorporated the results of our discussions with the youths in this community in the subsequent comments.

The drug prevention worker is rarely in a position to alter the social and psychological circumstances in which drug relationships are established. Further, substance use, such as alcohol, is an established part of our culture. Accordingly, it is unreasonable to aspire to the goal of having young people abstain from drug use. To maintain such a posture can call the credibility of drug prevention efforts into question. Given these considerations, drug prevention personnel would be well advised to help ghetto youth relate to substances in a manner that minimizes their chances of becoming dysfunctionally involved with drugs. That is, efforts should be directed to preventing experimental and social-recreational users of substances from becoming dependent on

drugs.[29]

As indicated earlier, the success of this effort will be enhanced by attempts to assess the social and drug behavior of individuals and groups in particular geographic-cultural areas. A combination of survey and ethnographic research would be helpful in this work. Specific target groups, reflecting a range of substance use relationships, would be identified, and the salient aspects of their experience uncovered. Particular methods of addressing these individuals would also be suggested.

With this information in hand, instruction to prevent dysfunctional drug use should proceed by relating the use of substances to the important values and identifications of particular target audiences-along with the personal and social risks that the use of specific drugs entail. Drug prevention workers should avoid taking an advocate role in this process. Ultimately, the decision to initiate and continue a drug relationship rests with the young people concerned. Their decision making in this regard will be enlightened if the youths can translate the issues surrounding drug use into experiences they can understand and act upon.

Helping young people to avoid dysfunctional drug use would most profitably involve young persons, especially peer group leaders,[30] from the neighborhoods in which particular target audience members live. Their involvement could include the development of particular prevention activities, as well as being participants in the process. Such a relationship of young people to prevention efforts would serve to implement the findings of the research that has been advocated.

This strategy, also, capitalizes on the identifications young people have with their fellows and facilitates their translation of the factors surrounding drug use into experiences that are meaningful to them. We do not wish to imply that there is no place for the professional drug prevention worker in the ghetto. However, we want to emphasize that his role is best conceived as one of a facilitator with the social networks of the young persons to whom he intends to direct his efforts.

The use of target audience members in prevention activities would be most fruitful if they are appropriately trained. The process of training inner-city youths to become prevention aides is a matter that lies beyond the scope of the present paper. There is a growing literature documenting some strategies for these efforts to which the reader can refer.[31] At the very least, prevention aides should receive: (1) instruction in interpersonal relations, (2) current scientific knowledge in regard to drugs and the relationship of patterns of use to key personal, social and cultural factors and (3) information concerning resources to be sought for help with a drug problem. These experiences would go a long way toward the aide's development of a rational perspective on drug use, abuse and the dysfuntional involvement of young people with particular substances.

In this vein, the development of school-based prevention programs by having students contribute to both the creation and running of these activities, such as the SPARK concept,[32] is especially promising. In addition to establishing a particular program format, the shared experience and understanding that is necessary for the implementation of these efforts constitutes an exercise in prevention in its own right. Non-school prevention contacts should be made with street involved youths in playgrounds, favorite street corners and recreation

centers. Again, these activities should be pursued with the collaboration of persons in the community who are well-regarded by the young people concerned.

How prevention programs will look for youths in a particular neighborhood, including the means of communication they employ, will depend on the socio-cultural and historical features of their community. At any rate, all creative attempts to involve young people in prevention activities are to be encouraged. Drug prevention efforts cannot succeed unless the young people whose drug behavior is the focus of our concern are brought deeply into the prevention picture.

We believe the most exciting challenge facing drug prevention in the 1970's concerns the integration of young persons into these programs. The manner in which prevention workers respond to this challenge will have strong implications for the future of drug prevention in the inner-city.[33]

NOTES

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11. See: R. Dembo and R. McCron, "Social mapping and media use," in J.R. Brown (ed), Children and Television (London: Cassell and Collier - Macmillan, 1976) and R. Dembo, "Critical factors in understanding adolescent aggression," Social Psychiatry, Vol. 8, 1973.

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13. W.B. Miller, "Lower class culture as a generating milieu of gang delinquency," Journal of Social Issues, Vol. 14, 1958; M.E. Wolfgang and F. Ferracuti, The Subculture of Violence (London: Tavistock, 1969).

14. For a fuller discussion, see: R. Dembo, "Critical factors," op. cit.

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27. For example, see: S.C. Weaver and F.S. Tennant Jr., "Effectiveness of drug education programs for secondary school," American Journal of Psychiatry, Vol. 130, 1973 and R. Dembo and M. Miran, "Evaluation of drug prevention programs by youths in a middle-class community," International Journal of the Addictions, forthcoming.

28. For a parallel argument, see: R. Brotman and F. Suffet, "The concept of prevention and its limitations," The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, Vol. 417, 1975.

29. For a relevant discussion, see: National Advisory Commission on Criminal Justice Standards and Goals, "Programs for drug abuse treatment and prevention." In the Advisory Commission's report volume: Community Crime Prevention (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1973).

30. A similar point is made in: National Advisory Commission on Criminal Justice Standards and Goals, "Programs for drug abuse treatment and prevention," op. cit.

31. For examples, read: M. Miller, "Drug education: A re-evaluation," Journal of Drug Education, Vol. 1, 1971 and Drug Abuse Council, Students Speak on Drugs: The High School Student Project (Washington, D.C.: Drug Abuse Council, 1974).

32. T. Capone, J.H. McLaughlin and F. Smith, "Peer group leadership program in drug abuse prevention 1970-1971 Academic year, "Journal of Drug Education, Vol. 3, 1973.

33. Earlier versions of this paper profitted from the comments of Torrington Watkins, Richard Stephens and Douglas S. Lipton.